Our Kids: Summary, Implications and Recommendations
This report to the residents and leaders of Utah County not only provides an overview of the Utah County Community Assessment 2015, but also our recommendations for the community’s continued improvement. These recommendations were developed by Civicus Consulting Group after analysis of community data, telephone survey data, focus groups, and consultations with scores of community leaders, residents, and stakeholders. Funders of this project, though gratefully acknowledged, are not responsible for the recommendations found herein.

Civicus Consulting Group
Richmond, Missouri
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To remain competitive, Utah County must change.

To maintain its lifestyle, it must deal with growth in new ways.

To remain a viable, thriving community, it must focus on the next generation with greater emphasis than ever before.

In his ground-breaking book *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*, noted sociologist Robert D. Putnam explained that as the American Dream is slipping further and further out of the next generation’s grasp, there is one philosophical underpinning that has driven every solution to community problems.

That underpinning is “a commitment to invest in other people’s children,” because “those kids” are “our kids.”
INTRODUCTION

Since 2000, Utah County’s population has grown to nearly 550,000 residents—an increase of 47 percent, making it the fastest growing of any county in Utah. Indeed, of the total population increase in the state of Utah since the turn of the century, about 27 percent is attributable to Utah County.

With rapid population growth comes economic development and opportunities for jobs, education, entrepreneurship, and cultural and social vitality. But rapid growth can also bring increased demands on infrastructure, education, health care, and human services.

In the fall of 2014, Civicus Consulting Group, from Richmond, Missouri, was contracted to conduct a follow-up assessment of Utah County. The prior community assessment, conducted in the fall of 2010 and early spring of 2011, had served as a guiding document and resource for policy makers, business leaders, human service providers, educators, health care providers, and others. The intent of conducting an updated assessment was to obtain current data, learn public perceptions, consider stakeholder expertise, and develop recommendations.
OBSERVATIONS

After culling through these data, a number of observations can be made:

- **Utah County has tremendous assets.** Parks, recreation, cultural activities, public and private education, and access to outdoor activities abound. Despite the rapid population growth, crime has remained remarkably low.
- **Improvements in education.** Following the 2011 assessment, the community embarked on efforts to improve 3rd grade reading scores and other outcomes of good education. Recent measures indicate improvements have been made, although more has yet to be accomplished.
- **Utah County continues to experience growing pains.** The significant population growth continues to stress certain elements of infrastructure, housing, education, health care, economic opportunities, and human services.
- **Affordable housing is an issue.** The prior assessment identified affordable housing as a need in the Utah County area. That need has only increased; the awareness of this need among the general public indicates that more and more individuals are being affected by the high costs of housing.
- **Low-income and minority population gaps.** Despite improvements in some areas, the influx of non-English speakers continues to cause gaps in income and education.
- **Utah County lacks a comprehensive, collaborative, long-term human service plan.** Although some individual agencies and some groups of similar-mission nonprofits work together to collaborate in the delivery of services and in strategic planning (such as the Housing Solutions Workgroup and the Mountainland Continuum of Care), there is no long-term human service planning group or mechanism addressing 10- to 20-year efforts.
RECOMMENDATIONS

AFTER REVIEWING THESE DATA, considering best practices from other communities, and exploring options with community stakeholders—and drawing on the expertise of our consultants and researchers at Civicus Consulting Group—we offer the following recommendations to the leaders and residents of Utah County. More details on these recommendations are at the end of this report.

• **Continue the community’s focus on education in order to alleviate long-term problems stemming from poverty and crime**—which are negatively correlated with education.

• **Constantly ask, “Are we doing what’s best for 20 or 30 years from now?”** To meet the demands of the growing population, innovative approaches must be developed.

• **Focus family, neighborhood, community, human service, and faith-based efforts on building resiliency in children, adults, and families.** Today’s human service providers cannot expect to be able to meet future needs without the entire community’s help.

• **Prioritize programs and services to address future needs now before they become big problems later.** It is easier—and more effective—to help a seven-year-old develop personal resiliency than it is to provide therapy to a 17-year-old contemplating suicide.

• **Work collaboratively to build funding models for future needs.** Community endowment funds and public funding are options that could be considered.

• **Develop a collective public policy effort in order to meet the needs of families and individuals in growing communities.**

• **Continue efforts at developing solutions to relieve the pressure of high housing costs.**
SUMMARY

BY MANY MEASURES, UTAH COUNTY IS A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE. Provo
and Utah County have been ranked among the best places in
America in a number of categories—from #1 City and #1 County
for Volunteering to #2 Best City for
Work-Life Balance and #4 Most
Educated City. These national
rankings only confirm what most
residents of Utah County already
know: that there are reasons—many
of them—that growth in Utah County
is the fastest in the state. There are
so many positives about the area that
the negatives are rarely considered
or even seen.
# Utah County’s Recent Recognitions

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<td>7</td>
<td>State of Well-being</td>
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<td>Gallup-Healthways</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>City for Volunteering in Nation</td>
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<td>Corporation for National and Community Service</td>
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<td>Best Cities for Work-Life Balance</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Best Places for Business and Careers</td>
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<td>Greatest Places to Live in America</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Outside Magazine</td>
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<td>Fastest-Growing On-the-Rise Startup Hubs</td>
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<td>SpareFoot.com</td>
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<td>Best Cities for Successful Aging</td>
<td>2014</td>
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<td>Most Educated Cities</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>WalletHub.com</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Cycling Rate among Mid-Sized Cities</td>
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<td>Cycling Magazine</td>
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<td>Best Economically Performing Cities</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Smartest Cities in America</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Business Insider</td>
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Utah County’s population has grown from 368,536 in 2000 to nearly 552,000 in 2013.

It accounts for 27 percent of all growth throughout the state of Utah. We asked adult residents in our telephone survey, “What would you say are the best things about living in Utah County?” More than one in four responded that the overall quality of life was the best thing. About a quarter talked about the mountains or other recreation. About 12 percent spoke of family, friends, or the friendliness of the residents who live in Utah County. Arts, schools, jobs, and other responses were also prevalent.

What would you say are the best things about living in Utah County?

- Quality of Life: 27%
- Mountains/recreation: 25%
- People/friends/family (in general): 12%
- Arts/culture: 11%
- Family values/family friendly: 10%
- Jobs/economy: 8%
- Schools/education/universities: 5%
- Other: 1%
Perhaps “families friendly” and “good people” and “recreation” are cited so frequently—and are so important to the residents of Utah County—because of the age of its people. Utah County is certainly one of the youngest—if not the youngest—counties in the country. With a median age of only 24.4, Utah County’s residents are vibrant, energetic, creative, and innovative. The median age of most municipalities in Utah County fails to exceed—or even reach—the state’s median age of 29.6. Provo’s median age is 23.5. Orem’s is 26.4. And Saratoga Springs—a relatively new municipality on the north and western side of Utah Lake—has a median age of only 18.7.
CHILDREN AND YOUTH UNDER AGE 18 MAKE UP 35 PERCENT of Utah County’s population—and those age 65 and older make up only 7 percent. Both of these numbers are in stark contrast to national averages. Nationally, the under-18 group is only 24 percent of the overall population, and the over-64 group is 13 percent.
Utah County’s Hispanic population is now at 11 percent of the total population, compared to 17 percent in Salt Lake County and 13 percent for the state. Nationally, 17 percent of the population is Hispanic.

The growth in the Hispanic population has seemed to slow in the past three years, growing from 10.8 percent of Utah County in 2010 to only 11 percent in 2013.
Utah County differs from the rest of the nation in household makeup. Nationally, 66 percent—about two-thirds—of all households are “family households.” (The Census Bureau defines “family households” as “a householder and one or more other people related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption.” Grandparents with grandchildren present, but without the intervening generation, are not considered “family households.”) In Utah County, 82 percent of households are family households.

But the differences continue. Of all family households in the United States, 16 percent do not have their own children in the home. In Utah County, 34 percent do not have children—more than twice the national rate. These Utahns are likely either young married couples who have not yet had children, or are older married couples whose children have moved from the home.

And the balance of family households—50 percent in the U.S., and 48 percent in Utah County—do have children younger than 18 in the home.
**EDUCATION**

**Utah County continues to be a highly educated community.** More than three out of four residents over the age of 25 have attended at least some college. This compares to 65.8 percent of Salt Lake County residents, 67.3 percent of Utahns as a whole, and only 57.8 percent of all Americans. Where only 23 percent of Salt Lake County residents over the age of 25 have only a high school education, the rate in Utah County is 17.1 percent.

![Educational Attainment Chart](chart.png)

- **Educational Attainment (Percent)**
  - High School graduate only: 28.1, 23.6, 23.2, 17.1
  - College: U.S.: 57.8, Utah (State): 67.3, Salt Lake County: 65.8, Utah County: 76.5
Public elementary and secondary education in Utah County continues to be strong, though some challenges to success are present. Alpine School District is among the largest—if not the largest—school district in the state, with approximately 75,000 students. Nebo’s 32,000 students and Provo School District’s 17,000 students combine to make about 125,000 public school students in Utah County. Approximately 18 percent of the student body is Hispanic or a racial minority.

Race & Ethnicity in Utah County Public Schools

- White: 82.3%
- Other: 17.7%
- Hispanic: 12.1%
- Pacific Islander: 1.2%
- Two or More Races: 2.3%
- Asian: 0.9%
- Black: 0.7%
- American Indian: 0.5%
- Other: 17.7%
English Learner students make up about 4 percent of Utah County’s student body. This compares to 9 percent of Salt Lake County’s, 3 percent of Davis County’s, 8 percent of Wasatch County’s, and 5 percent of Summit County’s. Juab County’s English Learner students make up less than 1 percent of the student population.

Low-income students make up 29 percent of Utah County’s school districts’ student body, lower than Salt Lake County’s 45 percent and Juab County’s 37 percent.

In numbers of students, nearly 35,000 Utah County students live below the federal poverty level.
When looking at students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch, Utah County's percentage jumps to 31 percent, while Salt Lake is at 41 percent.
Utah County’s graduation rates are generally improving, with 88 percent of students in the 4-year cohort ending in 2014 graduating on time. This is an increase over the previous year’s 85 percent. About three out of four of Salt Lake County’s students are graduating, and 91 percent of Davis County’s students.
Utah County’s single-year dropout rate is better than the state average—and has been for many years. After experiencing two years of increases in 2012 and 2013, Utah County’s dropout rate has decreased to about 1 percent, compared to the state average of 5 percent.

![Single-Year Dropout Rates, 2010-2014](image)
3rd grade reading scores have improved since the last community assessment was completed in 2011. The community rallied around the call for more involvement by parents and volunteers in helping children learn to read by the end of 3rd grade after the prior assessment showed some rates were as low as 77 percent in 2008 and 78 percent in 2010. As a county, the total percentage of 3rd grade students reading at grade level is 82 percent—up from 80 percent in both 2007 and 2008, and from 81 percent in 2010. The community is commended for focusing efforts on this indicator of future success, and encouraged to continue this focus.
A significant improvement has been seen in public perception regarding education since the last assessment. In 2011, less than 30 percent of adult respondents to a telephone survey strongly agreed that “When a student does not do well in school, everyone suffers the consequences.” In 2014, that number increased to 70.5 percent.
INCOME

Utah County’s income distribution is a near-perfect bell curve, with 22 percent of the population having a median household income between $50,000 and $74,999. For the most part, all categories of household income as measured by the U.S. Census Bureau mirror those in Salt Lake County and the state of Utah as a whole.
However, 14 percent of Utah County’s population—and 11.6 percent of all families—are in poverty. This equates to approximately 23,000 children who are living below the federal poverty line. This compares favorably to the state’s average of 12.9 percent and the U.S. number of 17.8 percent. Considering the large number of families with children in Utah County, this figure is important to track.

Of all individuals in poverty in Utah County, nearly 15,000 are in married-couple families. About 1,077 are male householders with no wife present; about 6,283 are female householders with no husband present.
Hispanic householders are more likely to be in poverty than other racial or ethnic groups in Utah County. Of all such households, 20.4 percent of married-couple families are in poverty, and 48.8 percent of Hispanic female householders without a husband are in poverty.

**Families in Poverty: Householder of Hispanic Origin**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Utah State</th>
<th>Salt Lake County</th>
<th>Utah County</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent married-couple families below poverty level</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number married-couple families below poverty level</td>
<td>982,091</td>
<td>8,640</td>
<td>3,864</td>
<td>1,772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent female householder--no husband present--below poverty level</td>
<td>40.1%</td>
<td>47.1%</td>
<td>47.2%</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number female householder--no husband present--below poverty level</td>
<td>1,107,159</td>
<td>7,006</td>
<td>3,727</td>
<td>741</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Education is positively correlated to income. In Utah County, 25 percent of all adults age 25 or older who are in poverty have not graduated from high school or received an equivalent certificate. About 11 percent of those with only a high school diploma are in poverty; only 6 percent of adult residents with a bachelor’s degree are in poverty.
In our last assessment, the growing need for affordable housing was evident in a few ways, but most starkly in the number of housing units per household. In 2009, that ratio had dropped to .95 units for every household—down from 1.04 in 2000. That trend has now reversed, with 1.10 units per household in 2013.
**Health**

Utah County residents are generally in good health and are engaged in healthy behaviors. In the 2013 Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System survey conducted by the Utah Department of Health, 89.2 percent of Utah County residents reported their overall health status as excellent, very good or good.
Only 6 percent of adults in Utah County smoke, compared to 12 percent in neighboring Salt Lake County. And 4 percent say they engage in excessive drinking—compared to 12 percent in Salt Lake County.
The fertility rate in Utah County, though dropping, is still above Salt Lake County’s rate. At 43.23 births per 1,000 females of childbearing age, Utah County’s rate has decreased from a previous high of 54.36 in 1999.

There are a number of agencies and programs serving persons with disabilities in Utah County. Educational attainment among persons with disabilities is a consideration. Nearly 40 percent of persons with disabilities have attended at least some college (compared to 40.1 percent of those without disabilities), and about 23 percent have a bachelor’s degree (compared to 38.5 percent of those without a disability).
Suicide rates in Utah County have increased since 1999, but have stayed below both the state rate and Salt Lake County’s rate. At 15.04 suicides per 100,000 population, it is higher than 1999’s 8.93.

In our telephone survey of Utah County adults, suicide was mentioned by only 4 percent of all responses to the question, “What would you say are the most pressing issues or problems facing residents of Utah County?” When asked to rate suicide specifically, only 37 percent gave it a “5”—the highest ranking possible—on the scale of importance to the community. About 35 percent gave it a 4, and 7 percent rated it as “Not at all important.”
When it comes to crime and safety, Utah County is a very safe place, with declining violent and declining property crime rates.

Provo’s violent crime rate in 2012 was 127.5 crimes per 100,000 population, a decrease from a high of 225.8 in 1988—but slightly higher than 2003’s 110.5.

Provo’s and Orem’s property crime rates have decreased steadily since 2004. Orem’s property crime rate in 2012 was 2,357.7 crimes per 100,000 population, and Provo’s at 2,109.
Domestic violence is present in Utah County—perhaps more than most people realize. In 2011, 466 cases of domestic violence were filed in the 4th District Court (which includes Juab, Millard, Utah, and Wasatch Counties). In 2012, that number dropped, but only slightly: 451 cases were filed. In 2012 546 temporary protective orders and 216 protective orders were also filed in the 4th District Court.
Fortunately, the rate of substantiated child abuse cases has decreased in Utah County since 2008. In that year, the rate was 11 cases per 1,000 children, for a total of 1,814 cases. In 2012, the rate had dropped to 8.3 cases per 1,000 children, with 1,451 cases filed.
**Population Projections**

**Utah County’s population is expected to continue to grow.** By 2020, more than 660,000 residents will call Utah County home; by 2030, that number will grow to more than 800,000.
Household size is expected to decrease in Utah County, but it will still remain above state and national norms. Utah County’s current 3.57 persons per household will decrease to 3.06 by 2060. The number of households in Utah County at that point will be nearly 450,000, compared to today’s 141,350.
IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: AN ANALOGY

In 1979, engineers, scientists, and planners with the Central Utah Project submitted documents that completed the first stage of planning for the Jordanelle Reservoir. More studies and more planning were needed, but at last the first stage was completed. Eight years later, in 1987, construction of the reservoir began. And six years after that—in 1993—construction was finished.

But this was only the beginning. It wasn’t until July 1996 that the reservoir was filled to usable capacity. Today, the Jordanelle Dam not only meets municipal and industrial water needs, but provides recreation to more than 200,000 visitors each year.

After decades of planning and work, Jordanelle is serving its purpose. From that day in 1979 to the filling of the reservoir was 17 years. If planners had not prepared for the future many years in advance, residents of central Utah would be in dire straits today.

But thanks to the wisdom of experts and engineers, of planners and professionals, water is being provided when it is needed most.

This is the approach needed in Utah County for the future of human services. Short-term planning is no longer sufficient. Long-term is the watchword for today.
EXPERTS, ELECTED OFFICIALS, COMMUNITY LEADERS, NEIGHBORS, FAMILIES, AND INDIVIDUALS MUST THINK AND ACT IN A MULTI-DECADE WAY IN ORDER ADEQUATELY MEET THE DEMANDS OF THE FUTURE.

To meet the mounting needs of a fast-growing population, we recommend Utah County implement the following.

- **Continue the community’s focus on education in order to alleviate long-term problems stemming from poverty and crime**—which are negatively correlated with education. The higher one’s education, the less likely one is to live in poverty, commit crime, or be a victim of crime. Continued emphasis on childhood literacy, childhood numeracy, and graduation rates will pay large dividend for years to come.

- **Constantly ask, “Are we doing what’s best for 20 or 30 years from now?”** To meet the demands of the growing population, innovative approaches must be developed. Financial and human capital must be devoted to planning that relies on and has access to an adequate knowledge base. The best plans explore all options, define best practices, and implement change.

- **Focus family, neighborhood, community, human service, and faith-based efforts on building resiliency in children, adults, and families.** Today’s human service providers cannot expect to be able to meet future needs without the entire community’s help. Today, the resources are not available to tackle every critical issue—from suicide prevention to domestic violence to housing costs to serving those with disabilities. But by building resiliency in children, in families, and in neighborhoods, many future problems will be mitigated and future needs will be avoided.
• **Prioritize programs and services to address future needs now before they become big problems later.** It is easier—and more effective—to help a seven-year-old develop personal resiliency than it is to provide therapy to a 17-year-old contemplating suicide. While acknowledging (and providing for) the need for stabilizing services such as rental assistance, crisis intervention, and counseling for victims of domestic violence or abuse, the community must turn to collaborative, innovative, long-term solutions to prevent these types of issues in the future. Needs resulting naturally from the skyrocketing growth of Utah County cannot be provided for in the same way that current and past needs have been.

• **Work collaboratively to build funding models for future needs.** Community endowment funds and public funding are options that could be considered.

• **Develop a collective public policy effort in order to meet the needs of families and individuals in growing communities.** Establish common objectives, build plans, involve and educate policy makers and legislative bodies, and inform the public.

• **Continue efforts at developing solutions to relieve the pressure of high housing costs.** Safe and affordable housing are foundational to thriving communities; Utah County’s exceptional economic success and increased demand have led to high-cost housing that many residents—particularly those just starting out as young adults and those who are new to the area—are unable to afford.
We are confident that as Utah County continues its focus on the long term by implementing these recommendations, the community will not only prevent the problems that result from staggering growth, but will continue to thrive and provide for the common good of all its residents.

And residents will renew their individual and collective commitment to *our kids*. 
We gratefully acknowledge the funders of this research.

Boys and Girls Clubs of Utah County
Community Action Services and Food Bank
Center for Women and Children in Crisis
Housing Authority of Utah County
Kids on the Move
Mountainland Head Start
Provo City Housing Authority
United Way of Utah County
Utah Community Credit Union
Utah County Health Department
Wasatch Mental Health